

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 3 COLOMBO 2102

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SUBJ: UNITED NATIONAL PARTY OPTIMISTIC AS CAMPAIGN GETS
UNDERWAY

REF: COLOMBO 1601 (NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: FOR A PARTY WHICH HAD ONLY 19 SEATS IN THE NOW-DISSOLVED NATIONAL STATE ASSEMBLY OF 157, THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY IS ASTONISHINGLY CONFIDENT THAT IT WILL WIN THE ELECTION AND FORM THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. THAT CONFIDENCE ARISES FROM THE PERCEIVED DISSATISFACTION OF VOTERS WITH THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT, THE SPLIT IN THE ANTI-UNP VOTE RESULTING FROM THE BREAKUP OF THE UNITED FRONT OF 1970, THE TREND IN BY-ELECTIONS, AND THE TRADITIONAL PENDULUM SWING OF ELECTORAL RESULTS IN SRI LANKA. DESPITE THE PARTY'S CONFIDENCE, CANDIDATES OFTEN FEEL IT NECESSARY TO PROCLAIM THAT THE PARTY REGRETS ITS CAPITALIST PAST AND IS TRULY REFORMED. THE UNP ENVISAGES THE KEY ISSUES OF THE CAMPAIGN TO BE GOVERNMENT CORRUPTION AND INEFFICIENCY, THE HIGH COST OF LIVING, CONTINUED SEVERE UNEMPLOYMENT, AND THE "FEUDAL" DOMINANCE OF THE BANDARANAIKE FAMILY. THE UNP PROGRAM HAS BEEN LAID OUT IN GENERAL FORM IN ITS ELECTION MANIFESTO (REFTEL). THE TRADITIONAL FOUNDATION OF THE UNP VOTE HAS BEEN THE CATHOLICS, THE MINORITIES (MOSLEMS AND TAMILS
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OUTSIDE JAFFNA), AND THE URBAN POPULATION. HOWEVER, IT STILL REMAINS TO BE SEEN WHETHER THE UNP CAN MAKE SUFFICIENT INROADS IN THE STRONGLY-SLFP VILLAGES TO WIN A MAJORITY IN THE NSA. IN THE PARTY'S FAVOR IS A VIGOROUS EARLY-STARTING CAMPAIGN, GOOD FINANCING, AND A PARTY UNIFIED BY THE PROSPECTS OF THE SPOILS OF POWER. THE EXPULSION OF RAKMAN SENANAYAKE AND A FEW OTHER DISSIDENTS IN MID-1976 HAS NOT HURT THE PARTY'S POLL PROSEPECTS. END SUMMARY.

2. AS THE CAMPAIGN GETS UNDERWAY IN PREPARATION FOR ELECTIONS

ON JULY 21, THE UNITED NATIONAL PARTY, NOW IN OPPOSITION, APPEARS SUPREMELY CONFIDENT THAT IT CAN DEFEAT THE SRI LANKA FREEDOM PARTY AND UNITED LEFT FRONT AND FORM THE NEXT GOVERNMENT. SUCH CONFIDENCE MIGHT APPEAR TO BE BELIED BY THE RESULTS OF THE 1970 ELECTION, IN WHICH THE UNP FELL TO ITS LOWEST HISTORICAL EBB, WINNING ONLY 17 SEATS IN A PARLIAMENT OF 157 (AFTER BY-ELECTIONS, RESIGNATIONS, AND AN EXPULSION, THEIR TOTAL AT DISSOLUTION LAST MONTH WAS 19). HOWEVER, THE PARTY' CURRENT OPTIMISM STEMS FROM THESE MAJPI FACTORS:

A. VOTER DISSATISFACTION WITH THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE UNP BELIEVES LIVING CONDITIONS FOR THE MAJORITY OF SRI LANKANS HAVE NOT NOTICEABLY IMPROVED IN THE SEVEN YEARS OF MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S GOVERNMENT AND THAT THE HIGH COST OF LIVING AND PERIODIC SHORTAGES HAVE HELPED TO TURN THE ELECTORATE AGAINST HER.

B. THE BREAK-UP OF THE UNITED FRONT. THE IGNOMINIOUS DEFEAT OF THE UNP IN 1970 WAS BROUGHT ABOUT IN PART BY THE ALLIANCE OF THE SLFP WITH TWO MARXIST PARTIES, THE LANKA SAMA SAMAJA PARTY AND THE COMMUNIST PARTY. NOW THAT THOSE TWO PARTIES HAVE BROKEN WITH THE PRIME MINISTER AND FORMED A UNITED LEFT FRONT ALONG WITH FIVE SLFP DEFECTORS AND OTHER, THE RESULTANT THREE-WAY SPLIT IN MOST ELECTORATES CAN ONLY HELP THE UNP CANDIDATES.

C. THE TREND IN BY-ELECTIONS. OF THIRTEEN BY-ELECTIONS SINCE 1970, THE UNP HAS WON TEN TO THE SLFP'S TWO AND THE TAMIL FEDERAL PARTY'S ONE, FOR A UNP GAIN OF FIVE SEATS.
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D. THE PENDULUM SWING IN SRI LANKA ELECTIONS. EVERY ELECTION SINCE 1956 HAS RESULTED IN THE DEFEAT OF THE INCUMBENT PARTY, A TRADITION ATTRIBUTABLE TO THE INABILITY OF ANY GOVERNMENT TO MEET THE EXPECTATIONS OF THE ELECTORATE.

3. DURING THE CAMPAIGN, THE UNP WILL EMPHASIZE THE VERY HIGH COST OF LIVING WHICH, EVEN BY THE GROSSLY UNDERSTATED COLOMBO COST OF LIVING INDEX, HAS RISEN ALMOST 50 PERCENT SINCE 1970. EXPANDED IMPORTS AND THE RECENT 20 PERCENT PZVALUATION OF THE RUPEE HAVE BROUGHT DOWN PRICES OF FOREIGN-MADE GOODS; HOWEVER, PRICES OF SUCH LOCALLY-PRODUCED STAPLES AS COCONUTS AND COFFEE HAVE RISEN TO UNPRECEDENTED HEIGHTS. UNEMPLOYMENT IS ANOTHER PERENNIAL ISSUE IN CEYLON POLITICS. DESPITE ATTEMPTS TO SETTLE UNEMPLOYED YOUTHS ON COOPERATIVES FARMS AND TO ENLARGE THE CORPS OF GOVERNMENT TEACHERS AND CIVIL SERVANTS, IT IS APPARENT THAT NO PROGRESS HAS BEEN MADE IN SOLVING THE SENSITIVE AND POTENTIALLY EXPLOSIVE PROBLEM OF WIDESPREAD UNEMPLOYMENT. THE UNP WILL EXPLOIT THE ISSUE TO THE FULLEST AND HAS ALREADY BEEN ACCUSED OF SELLING CHITS THAT WILL SUPPOSEDLY GUARANTEE A GOVERNMENT JOB UNDER A UNP REGIME.

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4. INEFFICIENCY AND CORRUPTION, PARTICULARLY APPARENT IN THE COOPERATIVE SOCIETIES WHERE MOST OF THE POPULATION PURCHASES ITS RATIONS AND OTHER FAIR-PRICE ITEMS, WILL BE ANOTHER THEME OF THE UNP CAMPAIGN. GOVERNMENT M.P.'S, UNP'ERS WILL ARGUE, HAVE ENRICHED THEMSELVES THROUGH ABUSE OF THE COOPS AND THROUGH THE GRANTING OF PERMITS, JOBS, TRANSFERS, ETC. THEY WILL EMPHASIZE THE POLITICAL VICTIMIZATION SUFFERED BY NON-SLFP'ERS: "THE PRIVILEGED CLASSES TOURED THE WORLD AND ENRICHED THEMSELVES AT THE EXPENSE OF THE PEOPLE. THEY HAVE PROSPERED WHILE THE PEOPLE SUFFERED." THE UNP HAS PROMISED TO FORM A COMMISSION OF INQUIRY TO LOOK INTO COMPLAINTS OF ABUSES OF AUTHORITY BY THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE BANDARANAIKE FAMILY WILL INEVITABLY BE AN ISSUE IN THE CAMPAIG, WITH COMPARISONS BEING MADE BETWEEN SANJAY GANDHI AND ANURA BANDARANAIKE. THE PRESENCE OF THE PM'S RELATIONS IN IMPORTANT GOVERNMENT POSTS AND AS CANDIDATES AT THIS GENERAL ELECTION WILL BE CITED AS AN EXAMPLE OF THE DOMINANCE OF THE "FEUDAL" BANDARANAIKE/RATWATTE CLANS. (THE PRIME MINISTER HAS FOUR BROTHERS, A BROTHER-IN-LAW AND TWO DAUGHTERS ON THE PUBLIC PAYROLL.)

5. ALTHOUGH THE LINES OF THE UNP ATTACK ARE CLEAR, IT IS LESS CERTAIN JUST WHAT THE UNP'S PROGRAMS WILL BE IN THE EVENT OF VICTORY. THAT HAS BEEN SPELLED OUT IN GENERAL TERMS IN THE PARTY MANIFESTO (REF A), WHICH SEEMED TO INDICATE NOMAJOR CHANGES IN FOREIGN POLICY (ALTHOUGH THERE IS A WIDESPREAD CONFIDENTIAL

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ASSUMPTION AROUND THE COUNTRY THAT THE UNP IS MORE "PRO-U.S." THAN THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT AND THE LEFT IS BEGINNING TO WAVE THE OLD TAG OF "YANKEE DICKIE" AGAINST UNP LEADER JAYEWARDENA.) IN ECONOMIC POLICY, THE MANIFESTO DISCUSSES THE POSSIBILITY OF FOREIGN INVESTMENT IN FREE-TRADE ZONES TO BE ESTABLISHED. A PROPOSAL FOR A NEW CONSTITUTION, BASED APPARENTLY ON THE FIFTH REPUBLIC MODEL IN FRANCE, IS THE MAJOR INITIATIVE IN DOMESTIC POLICY.

6. ISSUES ASIDE, THE UNP, LIKE ANY PARTY, MUST LOOK TO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC BASES OF ITS SUPPORT. THE PARTY HAS BEEN TRYING FOR YEARS TO SHED ITS POPULAR IMAGE AS THE PARTY OF THE

RICH AND PRIVILEGED. ITS PROTESTATIONS THAT IT IS A POPULIST PARTY DEVOTED TO DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM REFLECT THE REQUIREMENTS OF MASS POLITICS IN SRI LANKA. THE TRADITIONALLY CONSERVATIVE AND ANTI-MARXIST CATHOLICS HAVE USUALLY SUPPORTED THE UNP BUT HAVE TENDED LESS TO BLOC VOTING IN PAST ELECTIONS. MOSLEMS HAVE ALSO GENERALLY PREFERRED THE UNP BECAUSE OF THE SINHALA BUDDHIST ORIGINS OF THE SLFP. THE MORE ASSIMILATIONIST TAMILS - THOSE WHO REJECT THE SEPARATIST OR FEDERAL PHILOSOPHY OF THE TAMIL UNITED LIBERATION FRONT - VOTE UNP, OUT OF PIQUE AT THE SLFP-INSPIRED NEW CONSTITUTION AND THE REDUCED EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES ARISING FROM THE EMPHASIS ON THE USE OF THE SINHALA LANGUAGE IN GOVERNMENT AND EDUCATION. ALL THREE OF THESE GROUPS -- CATHOLICS, MOSLEMS, AND TAMILS -- ARE PROPORTIONATELY MORE NUMEROUS IN THE URBAN AREAS OF SRI LANKA, WHICH HAS MEANT THE UNP VOTE IS CONCENTRATED IN COLOMBO AND KANDY. (SIGNIFICANTLY, BOTH THE LEADER AND EPUTY LEADER OF THE PARTY WILL BE CONTESTING COLOMBO ELECTORATES.) THERE ARE UNP ORGANIZATIONS AT VILLAGE-LEVEL THROUGHOUT THE ISLAND, BUT THE SLFP HAS DOMINATED THE RURAL VOTING, A FACTOR THAT HAS BEEN CRUCIAL TO ITS SUCCESSES IN 1956, 1960, AND 1970. IT IS PRECISELY THIS SEGMENT OF THE ELECTORATE THAT IT IS MOST DIFFICULT TO SECOND-GUESS FROM COLOMBO. THE UNP IS CONVINCED THAT THE VILLAGERS' LOT TOO HAS NOT BEEN A HAPPY ONE DURING SEVEN YEARS OF MRS. BANDARANAIKE'S RULE. IF THE PARTY CAN DENY THE

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SLFP A SUBSTANTIAL PORTION OF ITS RURAL HEARTLAND, THE UNP WILL BE WELL ON ITS WAY TO FORMING A GOVERNMENT. HOWEVER, IN THE RURAL AREAS THE VOTE-SPLITTING EFFECT OF THE "THIRD FORCE" UNITED LEFTIST EFFORT WILL NOT WORK IN THE UNP'S FAVOR TO AS GREAT AN EXTENT AS IN THE URBAN, WHERE THERE IS STRONG TRADE UNION MEMBERSHIP. IN SOME OF THE RURAL ELECTORATES, THE CONTESTS WILL BE FOR ALL PRACTICAL PURPOSES ONLY TWO-SIDED.

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7. WITH A MAXIMUM OF 168 SEATS TO DISTRIBUTE AND ONLY 19 COMMITTED TO SITTING M.P.'S THE UNP WAS ABLE TO SATISFY

MOST ELEMENTS OF THE PARTY SPECTRUM. AL SURVIVING CABINET MINISTERS IN THE UNP GOVERNMENT OF 1965-70 HAVE BEEN GIVEN TICKETS (ALTHOUGH MOST HAVE NOT BEEN PROMINENT ON ELECTION PLATFORMS OUTSIDE THEIR OWN ELECTORATE, IN KEEPING WITH THE UNP'S "NEW LOOK".) THE SO-CALLED "HULFTSDORF CROWD" OF BRIGHT, YOUNG, UPPER CLASS LAWYERS IS ALSO WELL REPRESENTED. ALTHOUGH THESE MEN ARE THE SPIRITUAL HEIRS OF THE ENGLISH-EDUCATED CLASS WHICH HAS DOMINATED THE PARTY IN THE PAST, THEY ARE THE ONES MOST QUICK TO PROCLAIM THE NEW DOCTRINES OF SOCIALISM AND ADHERENCE TO SINHALA TRADITION. THEN, TOO, THERE IS THE ATTEMPT TO RECRUIT RURAL-BASED CANDIDATES TO MAKE INROADS INTO THOSE SEATS IN THE SABARAGAMUWA, WESTERN, NORTH-WESTERN, AND NORTH-CENTRAL PROVINCES WHICH HAVE VOTED HEAVILY ANTI-UNP SINCE S.R.W.D. BANDARANAIKE'S SURPRISE VICTORY IN 1956. IT IS QUESTIONABLE WHETHER THE UNP CANDIDATES ARE THE MODEST TILLERS OF THE SOIL AND VILLAGE SCHOOL-TEACHERS THAT THE PARTY LIKES TO IMPLY; THEY SEEM TO TEND MORE TO THE RURAL ELITES AS DO THE CANDIDATES OF THE SLFP. THE MOST NOTABLE LOSER IN THE UNP CANDIDATE STAKES WAS YOUNG RUKMAN SENANAYAKE, NEPHEW OF A FORMER PRIME MINISTER. WHEN RUKMAN ANTAGONIZED J.R. LAST YEAR AND REVIVED THE PARTY LEADER'S DISTASTE FOR A SENANAYAKE DYNASTY, HE WAS DROPPED FROM THE PARTY AND NOT REINSTATED, DESPITE NUMEROUS PEACE OVERTURES. HE IS SITTING OUT THE

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ELECTIONS THIS YEAR, WHILE SOME OF HIS ASSOCIATES HAVE GONE OVER TO THE SLFP. HIS EXPULSION DOES NOT SEEM TO HAVE DAMAGED THE UNP'S PROSPECTS AT THIS ELECTION.

8. OUT OF POWER FOR THE PAST SEVEN YEARS, THE UNP HAS USED AT LEAST ITS LAST YEAR VERY PROFITABLY. WITH SUMMER 1977 AS THEIR ULTIMATE TARGET, PARTY LEADERS HAVE BEEN PLANNING ELECTION STRATEGY, CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUES, AND CANDIDATE LISTS IN GREAT DETAIL. AT LEAST SIX MONTHS BEFORE THE ELECTION, THE PARTY HAD FINISHED THE DRAFT OF A CAREFULLY THOUGHT-OUT, AND DELIBERATELY VAGUE, ELECTION MANIFESTO, AND HAD SELECTED MOST OF THE UNP CANDIDATES, PAPERING OVER ANY EMBARRASSING DIFFERENCES BEFORE THE PRESS BETAN SPOTLIGHTING EVERY CAMPAIGN BLUNDER. THE CANDIDATES, SECURE IN THE KNOWLEDGE THAT THEY WOULD NOT BE SHIFTED TO ANOTHER CONSTITUENCY AT THE LAST MINUTE, BEGAN DOOR-TO-DOOR CAMPAIGNING WELL BEFORE ANY OF THEIR OPPONENTS. EVEN THEIR CAMPAIGN TECHNIQUES -- FROM HOME MOVIES TO VILLAGE-LEVEL "BEAT SHOWS" -- HAVE THE APPEARANCE OF CAREFUL PREPARATION. THERE IS A NOVEL (FOR SRI LANKA) SHADOW CABINET, STILL EFFECTIVELY UNDER WRAPS, PLANNING CAMPAIGN AND POST-ELECTION POLICY FOR THEIR PUTATIVE MINISTRIES. ALL THIS PLANNING IS IN SHARP CONTRAST TO THE ACTIVITIES OF THE SLFP WHICH SEEMS TO HAVE CONCENTRATED MORE ON THE PERQUISITES OF POWER THAN ON THE MEANS OF RETAINING IT. ON THE OTHER HAND, IT IS POSSIBLE THAT THE EARLY START OF THE UNP CAMPAIGN MAY HAVE GIVEN RISE TO SOME EXTENT TO OVER-FAMILIARITY OR BOREDOM OF THE VOTER, IN CONTRAST TO THE SLFP CAMPAIGN, WHICH HAS GOTTEN

UNDER WAY AT THE LAST MOMENT (AS IT DID IN 1970), OWING TO THE
LATE SELECTION OF CANDIDATES.
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